



Eastern
Baptist
Association

Who, me?



Exploring God's call to
Baptist Ministry

All are called by God

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:36-39 NIV

All Christians everywhere are called to love and serve God and his world. His Spirit gives us gifts, abilities and experiences that enable us to serve Him, one another and the wider community. One of the foundational Baptist principles (known as 'the priesthood of all believers') affirms that all believers are called to be involved in God's mission and ministry. We all fulfil that mission and ministry in the places and among the people with whom we live, work and spend our time.

However some roles are mentioned in the Bible as being particularly significant for the health and growth of the church. God asks his churches to set aside some people to take on such a role to equip and prepare everyone to be involved in his work.

If you are reading this booklet it may well be that you sense that God is asking you to offer yourself for full-time Christian ministry in some capacity. This booklet outlines the process within the Eastern Baptist Association by which we seek to discern such a call with you and ensure that if God is calling you that call is recognised within the wider Baptist family, and that you are encouraged, fully trained and supported appropriately to enable and release you into that ministry.

Your call needs to be tested

It's worth saying right at the outset that the whole process of testing your call can feel arduous and is quite rigorous. There's a reason for that—Baptist Ministry is not a career choice but a calling from God and we want to make sure we all hear his voice clearly. We would not be

doing you any favours if we said, “Yes” because you are a nice person and we like you but God was not calling you.

Being a Baptist Minister is not easy. Just ask any Minister! Serving God and people in this way can be incredibly fulfilling and a real blessing. But you can also feel isolated at times because you have a different place in the local church to everyone else.



Sometimes you might face opposition from within your church, and you will be criticised (sometimes unfairly). Your family (if you have one) will be in a ‘goldfish bowl’ as the rest of the church looks at them differently (sometimes seeing them as ‘theirs’). God may well call you to leave the church in which you grew up in the faith and relocate.

You need to be sure of your call. There may be times when the knowledge that God has called you to this is the only thing that keeps you there. We’re not trying to put you off, but it is important that you go into this with your eyes as well as your heart open.

- Be fervent in your praying about this. Ask some trusted friends to pray with you and for you.
- Read your Bible regularly and especially note any times when God seems to be speaking to you about this.
- Talk with your family and friends. Listen to what God might be saying through them.

Your local church

The first place where God's call is tested is in your local church. This is because they are the people who know you and will have seen how you use your God-given gifts and abilities already. Some of those people may already have said something to you about how they sense that God might be calling you to Baptist Ministry of some form.

The first step is to talk with your Minister (if you have one) or some of the leaders of the church. Ask to pray with them and discuss whether or not they believe that God might be calling you in this way.

At this stage it is helpful to meet with your Regional Minister who will be delighted to meet with you, listen to you, and help you work out what God might be saying to you. They can also help you understand the discernment process a bit more and answer any questions.

As part of the process you will need to receive the commendation of your local church to the EBA and wider Baptist family as someone they believe is called to Baptist Ministry. This starts with the leadership / diaconate of the church commending you to a Church Meeting, where your call will be considered further before commending you to the wider Baptist family. The church may well get very excited about this (rightly so) but it is important that they are as objective as possible about whether God is calling you in this way. But their assessment of your call should be as considered as possible.



In the Bible there are qualities and characteristics that we would expect to see in those who are called to Ministry. In the Baptist family we call them the 'Marks of Ministry'. You can find out more about these in the 'Ignite' report on the Baptists Together website if you search for it, but in summary they are:

- ⇒ Clear evidence of a call that originates from God
- ⇒ A personal maturity and deepening of relationship with Christ.
- ⇒ Clear evidence that you're someone whom others naturally trust and follow.
- ⇒ A clear sense that God's purposes matter more than personal goals and aspirations .
- ⇒ A sense of belonging to the Body of Christ in all its diversity.
- ⇒ A proven ability and adequate humility to listen and learn.
- ⇒ An individual with measurable leadership potential .
- ⇒ Tenacity and character in the face of disappointment and struggle.
- ⇒ Fruits of ministry in the here and now.

As you look at that list, or as other people help you discern the answers, if there are significant gaps it may be worth considering what you can do to gain experience and knowledge before you proceed to the next stage.

Once your church has commended you to the Association to test the call further, you will be invited to attend a Ministerial Recognition Committee. Prior to an interview day you will be asked to fill in some forms that deal with your experience, sense of call, gifts and personality. You will also be asked to provide references, have the formal commendation of your local church, and arrange to be

EBA Ministerial Recognition Committee

observed in service that you lead and in which you preach.

The MRC interview day is an intensive day in which a group of people from the Association who have gifts and experience in discerning God's call will explore with you whether God is calling you to Baptist Ministry at this time. There may be other people exploring a call to Baptist Ministry on the same day but you will be going through the day individually. You may like to bring your spouse (if you have one) or a close friend to accompany you.

The day is based around interviews and group work in which areas around the 'Marks of Ministry' are discussed and explored.

At the end of the day, after you have been prayed for and are heading home, the MRC will remain to discuss and discern together. In essence there are three possible responses: 'yes', 'wait', and 'no'. Later that same day the MRC Secretary will contact you by phone to let you know of the outcome of the day. You will also later receive a formal letter confirming this.



Whatever the outcome of the day, your Regional Minister and church will be available to support and help you. If the answer is 'wait' or 'no' that is not a reflection on you as a person, it is simply an acknowledgement that God is not calling you to be a Baptist Minister at the moment. Try not to be too disheartened but take it as an encouragement to seek his will afresh.

After a positive commendation from the MRC you will need to apply to one of the Baptist Colleges to seek training. By this time you ought to have a clear idea of which college best suits you. They all have a slightly different 'flavour' but all will train you for Baptist Ministry.

They all have Open Days and it would be worth you attending one or two to get a feel for the people and the place. That will help you work out which one is best for you. They will also be able to talk with you about the financial cost of training (fees, etc) and the sort of training placement which is usually part of the training process.

College interview

The College will have an interview process that is not only about your academic ability but is also a part of the discernment process. This process continues throughout your time at the College. If you have some relevant prior learning the College will talk with you about adapting the course to take account of this.

If the College accepts you for training you will also need to undergo a medical examination (the College will advise you about this) and provide them with an enhanced DBS Disclosure to ensure that you are not unsuitable to work with children or adults at risk: your Regional Minister can help you with this.



Residential Selection Conference

It is possible that you may have significant previous ministerial experience, or previous theological training to a level that would be required by BUGB. If this is the case the MRC will recognise this and may commend you to the BUGB Residential Selection Conference. This event happens annually and can commend people directly onto the Register of Accredited Ministries, or might indicate a need for further training. (If you have not previously done so, you will be required to have completed an approved course in Baptist History and Principles. This can be done online through one of the Baptist Colleges.)

And finally...

God calls every follower of Jesus to fulfil his ministry and mission. You might feel inadequate for the task to which he is calling you. That's good: when you realise that you will rely on his gifts, his inspiration, his strength. Remember too that he will equip you for what his calling you to do and that he wants the best for you, which is what we're all seeking in the process of testing your call to Baptist Ministry. May God bless you as you seek his will.

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Growing healthy churches in relationship for God's mission in the East of England